

**Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee**

March 9th, 2009

**GOVERNOR'S BILL NO.830
AN ACT CONCERNING THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION**

Good afternoon Senator Gaffney, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Chris Kelly and I am a member of the Simsbury Board of Education. I am here to discuss how the current funding mechanism for Sheff initiatives is inhibiting fulfillment of the Sheff goals, and to propose an alternative funding mechanism for your consideration.

Current Funding Mechanism Inhibits Success

We all know the problem with the current funding mechanism. The average public school per student expenditure in Connecticut is \$12,200,* However, when a student moves out of the local district to a magnet school the tuition grant of \$7,620 leaves a gap of \$4,380 towards that full actual cost. For a student attending an open choice school, the grant of \$2,500 leaves a gap of \$9,500 towards the full actual cost.

The problem is that whereas we have created significant mobility of students between their local, project open choice, and magnet schools, we have not created a similar mobility of per student expenditure. The result that we are seeing is that:

- Host and inter-district magnet schools are either closing or charging tuitions which creates a disincentive for communities to promote magnet schools
- Development of new magnet schools has stalled
- Communities are reluctant to expand the number of open choice students they accommodate

Not only that, but the proposed requirement that a student's originating community will be required to pay the tuitions for any magnet schools, or be required to accept more choice students is creating a significant burden of new liabilities at the worse possible time. Bloomfield estimated that these requirements create at least a half million dollar new expenditure, and for Simsbury it creates at least a \$200,000 new expenditure.

All of this undermines the mobility of students so needed to achieve the Sheff goals.

Integrate Funding into ECS Formulas – Portability of Per Student Expenditure

One solution is for the state to provide grants equal to the actual per student expenditure. However this is unrealistic. It also is not be the most efficient funding mechanism.

Instead, I propose first that funding for Sheff initiatives be integrated into the ECS funding formulas, and secondly we establish that the combined local and ECS per student expenditure follow the student to whatever school and district they are educated in. This would apply to magnet schools as well as open choice students.

Part of the States ECS funding process is to identify the Net Current Expenditure per Student. In essence this is the average per pupil expenditure for all public schools in Connecticut. This is the \$12,200 figure I used previously. The State could identify an appropriate per student expenditure figure on an ongoing basis.

- If done right this would streamline and stabilize the funding
- It would ensure adequate funding for magnet schools, and create an environment to create more schools
- It would facilitate more promotion of magnet schools by school districts.
- It creates an incentive for communities to offer more open choice seats.

Conclusion – Fuel Mobility

I know that there are many details that would have to be worked out with this proposal. But I offer to you that enough towns want to facilitate enough students, moving to enough opportunities to achieve the ambitious goals of 41% of Hartford students in an integrated setting, and 80% of Hartford students at the school of their choice.

However, even though enough communities want to, they can't and won't until the real per pupil expense follows the student.

Management of Choice Program

I would also bring your attention to the proposal in the Governor's budget to transition management of Project Choice from CREC to the State Department of Education, and the States Regional School Choice Office.

We would like to see the choice program should remain with CREC. We have a long history of successful management, responsiveness to the local district and to Choice families and deep relationships with CREC staff and it would be detrimental to the program to move the management of Choice to the State Department of Education.

Thank You

* This is the current Average Net Current Expenditures per Pupil. The (NECP) reflects public elementary and secondary expenditures supported by local, state and federal revenues but excludes debt service, tuition revenue, and mandated public transportation.